

Dave Crooks

State Representative • District 63

Spring, 2000

Dear Friend,

The 2000 session of the Indiana General Assembly ended on March 3.

We passed several significant pieces of legislation, including a plan to distribute the funds Indiana will receive from the tobacco settlement and increased benefits for workers severely injured on the job. We also adjusted the unemployment compensation system, making improvements for both workers and employers.

I have detailed several new laws in this newsletter and have included some other information that you might find useful.

In the coming months, I will be working on interim study committees. Study committees allow legislators the opportunity to explore subjects in greater depth than is permitted during the session.

Please contact my office at 1-800-382-9842 if you have any questions or concerns regarding state government.

Sincerely,



How To Reach
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Health care is primary use of tobacco settlement

Certainly one of the biggest achievements of the 2000 legislative session was passage of legislation that sets up a system to allocate the more than \$4 billion Indiana will be receiving from the national tobacco settlement over the next 25 years. The funds will be used for health care services, tobacco prevention programs and assistance for senior citizens on lower incomes who have trouble purchasing prescription drugs.

In the first year alone, \$35 million will be dedicated toward health care programs, with an emphasis on tobacco education and prevention. Another \$20 million will be used to help seniors on low incomes purchase needed prescription drugs. Community health centers will receive \$15 million in program support, along with a one-time-only appropriation of \$10 million to make physical improvements to facilities.

Seniors also will see benefits

Senior citizens on lower incomes should not have to choose between buying food or the prescription drugs they need to remain healthy. Thanks to the legislation allocating money from the national tobacco settlement, they won't have to make that decision.

The final bill includes \$20 million to help low income seniors purchase prescription drugs. From my visits around the district, this is one of the most pressing concerns among older Hoosiers. Some people even have been forced to drive as far as Canada to get these drugs at a more affordable rate.



Rep. Crooks discusses legislation with Rep. Jerry Denbo.

Medicaid eligibility definition adjusted

Currently, Indiana requires that a person suffer from a life-long disability in order to receive Medicaid Disability assistance. The General Assembly approved legislation that would replace the life-long requirement with a four-year disability requirement.

Indiana has the most restrictive Medicaid Disability definition in the nation. Forty-eight other states require that a person suffer from a disability for one year. New Hampshire is the only other state which requires a four- year disability.

With so many advances in health care, there is a treatment for almost every type of ailment. Medicaid was designed to help needy individuals, but the current system excludes so many people from qualifying for the aid that most other states would offer them.

This is not an attempt to provide free health care to all Hoosiers. It simply modifies the restrictions just enough so that a few more deserving individuals are able to qualify.

Helping working men and women

Around 90 percent of Indiana workers who receive a disabling injury in a workplace accident will see their compensation increase close to 50 percent. There are improvements in the one-time cash payments made to a person who suffers a permanent partial impairment in a workplace accident. The change will help any worker determined to have up to the 30th degree of impairment, which includes around 90 percent of all injured employees. Weekly disability payments also will increase.

Indiana workers who lose their jobs will see unemployment compensation increase by 33 percent over the next three years. The maximum benefit will increase from \$252 to \$336 by July 2002. To finance the increase, the state will use a larger share of the unemployment trust fund, a move that will cut premium payments by employers by nearly \$80 million the next two years.

Inventory tax cuts greater than expected

Inventory tax cuts enacted by members of the Indiana General Assembly will provide more relief than originally anticipated for farm and small business owners across the state.

When we passed these cuts during the 1999 legislative session, savings were estimated at more than \$80 million in both 2000 and 2001. Now it appears those estimates were low, and the actual savings will be more than \$210 million in both years. This news means that many Hoosiers will see even smaller tax bills in the years ahead.

In the 1999 session, legislators approved a plan that provided a credit for property taxes paid on the first \$12,500 of assessed valuation on personal property, including inventory, mobile homes and farm and manufacturing equipment.

By enacting this credit and ensuring it covers both equipment and inventory, we eliminated inventory taxes for nearly 90 percent of the businesses and farms in Indiana. The inventory tax cut is just one part of what is now more than \$1.5 billion in tax relief for the people of Indiana that has been put in place over the past few years.

Other reductions approved during that time provide a new income tax deduction for homeowners that covers up to \$2,500 in property taxes, raise the exemption for dependent children from \$1,000 to \$2,500, increase the renter's deduction from \$1,500 to \$2,000, eliminate the property tax add-back for farmers and small businesses and put two breaks in place that benefit senior citizens: raising the income tax deduction from \$1,000 to \$1,500 and the property tax deduction from \$1,000 to \$2,000.

State web site an information gateway

The state web site provides a great deal of information about state government, the legislative process and other related items. The main site at www.state.in.us offers a nice starting point to explore government in Indiana.



A screen shot of my legislative home page

From that starting point, you can visit the home pages of elected state officials and state agencies. In addition, several premium services are available for a monthly fee.

I encourage you to visit my web site at www.state.in.us/R63 and explore various items related to the legislature and our district.

Receive legislative updates via e-mail

Several people have indicated to me that they would like to receive e-mail updates on legislative issues and other issues important to our district. I am pleased to offer this service through my legislative office.

Simply e-mail or call my office and I will add you to this list. I am excited about the technological advances over the past few years that allow you nearly instant access to legislative news and information.

Sign up to receive legislative updates via email
at <http://www.state.in.us/R63>



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